



# State of Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission

*Office of the Governor*

---

3101 W. Napoleon Avenue, Suite 102, Metairie, LA 70001

(504) 219-4593

**Report submitted to: Ruston Animal Control Officials and City of Ruston Government**

**Date of Report: September 28, 2009**

Representatives of the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH), Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section, recently completed an audit of your shelter facility located in Ruston, Louisiana. The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission (LAWC) is very grateful for your cooperation in the audit. The goal of this audit is to assist local and parish governing agencies in evaluating shelter facilities and planning improvements. Please accept the following comments in the constructive manner in which they are intended.

The Ruston animal shelter provided OPH personnel ready access to animal and personnel records. The shelter staff was very accommodating and shared information freely. Hours of operation and emergency contact information are displayed at the entrance to the shelter. Evidence of adequate record keeping was observed by the inspector. The shelter provides services to the citizens of Ruston and, by contract, Lincoln Parish during regularly scheduled business hours. Fees are registered with the city. Storage of food and medical supplies, and carcass disposal procedures are sufficient for shelter needs. Shelter management provides the shelter with a regular program of pest and rodent control. Veterinary care is provided on an "as needed" basis by local private practitioners. Vaccine, parasite control and spay/neuter policies meet accepted standards in Louisiana and shelter personnel demonstrate a basic knowledge of infection control when queried by the OPH inspector. Primary animal enclosures appear to be well maintained and in most instances are in a satisfactory state of repair. Lighting is adequate throughout the facility. In most cases sanitation methods appear to be compliant with acceptable methods of shelter hygiene. Records of employee training are excellent and the staff continually participates in formal continuing education programs.

The shelter maintains a separate room and table for euthanasia procedures and all euthanasia is performed by certified animal euthanasia technicians. Lethal injection, the preferred method of euthanasia in most pet species, is the exclusive method of euthanasia employed at the shelter. The shelter also does an exemplary job of separating dogs and cats.

Although near capacity, the shelter population is maintained in caging that does not show indications of overcrowding. Animals are screened for disease, vaccinated, and dewormed prior to adoption. The shelter stringently enforces requirements for rabies vaccination and spay/neutering in adopted animals.

I. The following suggestions are made based on the state statute (R.S. 3:2461, et seq.) listing minimum standards that may be adopted by public governing authorities:

*...to ensure and promote the proper treatment and well-being of animals*

A. Adequate local supervision: Louisiana law states that "shelters should be inspected at least once every six months by an authorized representative of the parish to determine compliance with the requirements" set forth in state statutes. Although the supervisory structure of the shelter was thoroughly explained to the auditors, no record of a formal system of inspection by any city or parish official was brought forth. LAWC suggests that the city establish a regular program of inspection and document the results for later examination by OPH auditors. This system of inspection should be recorded in a written policy. This system of inspection should be in addition to fire code inspections conducted by the fire department.

B. Posting of fees: There is no true reception area. The fees for shelter services are not obviously posted on the property. Based upon state law, LAWC recommends that the fees be "visibly" posted. LAWC recommends that the fees be displayed in a manner that is apparent to shelter visitors. The fees should be displayed in large font on an appropriate sign or poster, in the area where the public enters the property. Should funds become available for physical improvements to the facility, a reception area or facility would be desirable.

C. Primary enclosures: Louisiana law states that "primary enclosures shall be structurally sound and maintained in good repair to protect dogs and cats from injury, to contain them, and to keep predators out," and "constructed and maintained so as to enable the dogs and cats to remain dry and clean." Some deterioration of holders for food/water bowls in inside stainless steel cages exists. These conditions are not conducive to sanitation and are not resistant to accumulation of substrate that may promote bacterial growth. Replacement of rusted components or painting the objects with non-toxic paint should correct the situation. In outside runs, some of the chain link fencing is damaged in a few spots. The defects are not profound, but some require repair. Expansion of these defects could result in injury to the animals.

D. There is one restroom located at the facility. There are two additional sinks and a tub available. The Louisiana Revised Statutes state, "Facilities such as washrooms, basins, or sinks, shall be provided to maintain cleanliness among animal caretakers." Additional wash basins are desirable in animal wards or animal contact areas. Until these improvements in washroom facilities and increases in wash basin facilities are made, the shelter should consider installation of several hand sanitizer stations throughout all areas of the facility.

E. The Louisiana Revised Statutes state that "shelter shall be provided for all dogs and cats kept outdoors when atmospheric temperature falls below fifty degrees Fahrenheit," and that "the ambient temperature...not be allowed to fall below fifty degrees Fahrenheit." Animals in outdoor runs are protected from cold by canvas tarps that are rolled down when the temperature falls below fifty degrees Fahrenheit. Plastic dog houses are present in each run to facilitate additional protection from cold. This system is likely effective; however, should resources become available, electric heaters would improve the situation dramatically.

Adoption of the following practices should serve to improve the public image of the facility, enhance health and safety of the animals and workers, and/or decrease the likelihood of legal incidents and public complaints.

## II. Suggestions by LAWC to improve shelter management:

A. Although Ruston Animal Control abides by Chapter 7 of the city ordinances, and cross references the Louisiana Revised Statutes (R.S. 3:2461, et seq.), the standards specified in the Louisiana Revised

*...to ensure and promote the proper treatment and well-being of animals*

Statutes are not included in the ordinance. City government is strongly urged to consider including shelter standards in city ordinances.

B. Food storage: Louisiana law states that "Supplies of food and bedding shall be stored in facilities which adequately protect such supplies against infestation or contamination by vermin." As stated previously, no problems were observed in the food storage methods utilized at this shelter. LAWC, however, wishes to remind the shelter that food containers should be sealed when not in use to prevent entry of insects and rodents.

C. The lack of a dedicated observation and/or isolation ward may result in euthanasia of animals that, if suffering from a minor illness, could be separated, treated, and later offered for adoption. The small physical plant does not appear to foster the development of such a facility or enclosure. Again, future improvements to the physical plant should include planning for isolation of new intakes and animals that may suffer from minor health conditions. A larger facility that could facilitate a true isolation ward might result in a decrease in euthanasia procedures and a decreased potential for introduction of diseases that may result in a reduced adoptable population.

D. In the outside runs the floors are routinely cleaned only with water. Disinfectants are utilized only when a disease problem is noted. Cleaning floors by hosing with water, however, is inadequate to control infection. Mild, effective disinfectants and bleach solutions are commercially available and their use should control transmission of disease by animals that are inapparent carriers or asymptomatic shedders.

E. The shelter director approves the animals that are to be euthanized based on his observations and suggestions by well-trained animal control officers. LAWC recommends that this procedure be documented in writing in the form of a standard shelter policy, therefore eliminating any perception by the public that the decision is reached arbitrarily or capriciously. Written approvals with justification (reasons) for euthanasia should be recorded for review. LAWC recommends a formal "two-tiered" procedure for approval of euthanasia, whereby the decision to euthanize animals must be approved and attested to by a combination of two of the following personnel: kennel master, shelter manager, animal control officer, veterinarian, city official. The second official could attest to the euthanasia procedures after the fact, considering the small size of the shelter staff.

F. This report reminds shelter officials of the importance of written policies for several procedures, including euthanasia, at public animal shelters. LAWC recommends that shelters also develop written policies for storage of food and supplies, shelter hygiene, employee training, isolation of animals, feeding, and shelter oversight. These protocols will assist in training employees and should reduce the chance for inadvertent errors.

G. As is seen in most public shelters in Louisiana, the proportion of animals reclaimed by owners or adopted out is relatively low in comparison to the number of animals taken in. LAWC may be able to assist in suggesting means for improving adoption rates. Several methods may be considered (e.g. increasing and improving adoption programs, utilizing foster care, employing the internet in attempts to better market adoptable animals, weekend hours open to the public, enlarging and improving the facility to improve public perception and accessibility).

H. LAWC has been introduced to several shelter management software packages. Some of these packages may be available to Louisiana shelters at no cost. LAWC encourages the use of shelter management software packages in Louisiana shelters. Please contact LAWC if interested in learning more about these programs.

*...to ensure and promote the proper treatment and well-being of animals*

I. Management runs an efficient operation under fairly austere circumstances. Expansion and improvement of the physical plant would ameliorate many of the deficiencies observed.

This concludes the report. OPH will request the statistics from calendar year 2009 in early January. Please be vigilant for the request.

Thanks again to the Ruston Animal Shelter for its cooperation in this audit. LAWC recognizes the shelter's dedication to humane animal control and animal welfare in Louisiana.

Submitted by: The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "A. Phillip Dupont".

A. Phillip Dupont, DVM, Commissioner

*...to ensure and promote the proper treatment and well-being of animals*